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Why did Jesus instruct us to pray ‘lead us not into temptation’?

Question: "Why did Jesus instruct us to pray 'lead us not into temptation' when God states that He does not tempt us?"

Answer: We know from [James 1:13](#) that God does not tempt us to sin. If God did tempt us to sin, He would be acting contrary to His holy nature, against His desire for us to be holy as He is holy ([1 Peter 1:16](#)), and against all other commandments in Scripture that tell us to avoid sin and flee temptation. In the Lord's model prayer ([Matthew 6:9-13](#)), Jesus says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (verse 13). The inclusion of a request for God not to lead us into temptation teaches us that [avoiding temptation](#) should be one of the primary concerns of the Christian life.

The idea of God leading His people is a main theme of Scripture. The book of Psalms especially is filled with pleas for God to lead us in His ways ([Psalm 5:8](#); [27:11](#)), by His truth and righteousness, and in "the way everlasting" ([Psalm 139:24](#)). Along with leading us *toward* good, we understand that we are asking God to lead us *away from* evil. The petition in the [Lord's Prayer](#) not to be led into temptation reflects the believer's desire to avoid the dangers of sin altogether. This phrase, then,

must be understood in the sense of “permitting.” Jesus taught us to pray, “Do not ‘allow’ us, or ‘permit’ us, to be tempted to sin.” This request implies that God has such control over the tempter as to save us from his power if we call upon our Heavenly Father.

There is another sense in which we are to plead with God not to lead us into temptation. The word *temptation* can also refer to trials. We know from [1 Corinthians 10:13](#) that God will not test us beyond our ability in Christ to bear it and will always provide a way out. But God sometimes subjects us to trials that may expose us to Satan’s assaults for His own purposes, as in the cases of Job and Peter ([Luke 22:31-32](#)). If the temptation in the Lord’s Prayer refers to trials, then the meaning of [Matthew 6:13](#) is, “Do not afflict or try us.” It is not wrong to pray that we may be delivered from trials and suffering, as long as we submit ourselves to the will of God, no matter what it is. The believer can rightly ask to be delivered from testing as well as ask for the strength to endure it if it does come.

We might illustrate Jesus’ words “Lead us not into temptation” like this: a mother takes her young children grocery shopping with her and comes to the candy aisle. She knows that taking her children down that aisle will only stir up greediness in their hearts and lead to bouts of whining and pouting. In wisdom, she takes another route—whatever she may have needed down the candy aisle will have to wait for another day. In this way the mother averts unpleasantness and spares her children a trial. Praying, “Lead us not into temptation,” is like praying, “God, don’t take me down the candy aisle today.” It’s recognizing that we naturally grasp for unprofitable things and that God’s wisdom can avert the unpleasantness of our bellyaching.

Whether we are asking for God to lead us away from sin or from difficult trials, our goal is found in the second part of verse 13: “Deliver us from the evil one.” A petition similar to this is offered by David in [Psalm 141:4](#): “Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies.” In all things, God is our deliverer, and we are wise to seek His power over sin.

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